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FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS

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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ATHENS 000654

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PARM TU GR

SUBJECT: GREECE/TURKEY: GREECE OBJECTS TO TURKISH MFA
WEBSITE

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Classified By: A/Political Counselor Jeff Hovenier for 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶11. (C) Greek FM Bakoyannis has publicly objected to statements on the Turkish Foreign Ministry website related to Greece, terming them "absolutely groundless." The Greek MFA has called in a Turkish Embassy representative and delivered a protest note in Ankara. The issue rose to public consciousness when media widely reported over the May 10) 11 weekend that the Turkish MFA website included "provocative" and "offensive" comments related to Greece, including statements about the Turkish community in Thrace (the "Turkish Minority of Western Thrace . . . make up the largest enclave group in the world today,") and the Aegean disputes (Greece "thirsts for expansion" of its territory), and a statement that Greece "seeks the destabilization of Turkey." Privately, MFA officials tell us that the offending text has been on the Turkish MFA website for some time, and that the Greek Government had previously made "less public requests" for the text to be removed or redrafted. End Summary.

FM Bakoyannis Criticizes Turkish MFA Website

¶12. (U) On May 12, Greek FM Bakoyannis told reporters that Greece has formally protested statements on the Turkish MFA website, terming the statements "absolutely groundless," and adding "we hope that these baseless claims are corrected." Bakoyannis told reporters that the MFA had summoned a Turkish Embassy representative to the MFA to seek "clarification" of these statements, and that the Greek Ambassador in Ankara had registered a complaint at the Turkish MFA.

Specifics on the Website

¶13. (SBU) The Greek media have widely reported that the Turkish MFA website (www.mfa.gov) eaty obligations to this community; has sought to assimilate and when that is not possible expel them; has pursued policies of discrimination against them; and is seeking to destroy their "Ottoman/Turkish cultural heritage."

A separate section refers to the community living as "the largest enclave group in the world." (Comment: The U.S. government has also registered specific human rights concerns about the situation of the Turkish minority in Thrace, including in the most recent annual Human Rights Report, although in more objective terms. End Comment)

-- A document entitled "Setting The Record Straight On Pontus Propaganda Against Turkey," which includes a statement that "the Greek priority target is the destabilization of Turkey,

presumably to be achieved by inciting assumed micro-nationalist feelings. The aim is to challenge Turkey's territorial integrity."

-- A document entitled "Background Note on Aegean Dispute" which lays out the Turkish perspective on ongoing Turkish/Greek differences over Aegean disputes, including the status of disputed islands, and sea and air territory. The primary point appears to be that Turkish policy "is based on respect for the status quo whereas Greece appears determined to alter it in its favor." The paper also includes a statement that the Greek actions during the 1996 Imia/Kardak crisis "is yet another proof of Greece's thirst for territorial expansion beyond areas ceded to her by the Lausanne Peace Treaty of 1923 and the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947."

Working-Level MFA -- Nothing New

¶4. (C) We raised the issue with MFA A4 Directorate for Relations with Turkey Deputy Director Katerina Natsika. Natsika said that she had been waiting for this story to break. Although the Turkish MFA website had been recently "technically upgraded," she said that all of the papers in question had been available on the previous website as well. She said that the Greek MFA had registered concerns about the

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Turkish MFA website's content "on several occasions," at "at various levels," but to no avail. "It remains unchanged, notwithstanding our various demarches," she added. She expressed hope that the current public outcry may lead Turkey to modify some of the documents on the website, but suggested that the Greek MFA is not expecting this step to be taken.

COMMENT) Making It Harder?

¶5. (C) Over the past several months, interlocutors at various levels from the MFA and the Prime Minister's Office have made clear that the GoG attaches particular importance to developing and maintaining a closer relationship with PM Erdogan, President Gul, and FM Babacan, as manifested by the January 2008 Karamanlis visit to Ankara, and more frequent contacts at the FM level, most recently last week in Strasbourg. Although these statements on the Turkish MFA website are unlikely to pose major obstacles to closer relations, they don't help. Given Greek political realities and innate Greek views towards Turkey, FM Bakoyannis had little choice but to take the steps she did to criticize publicly the documents and call for their revision. Should Ankara ignore these calls, the Turkish MFA website is likely to become a larger and more public part of the Greece/Turkey bilateral agenda. End Comment.
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